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TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 4674  
INFO RUEHZK/ECOWAS COLLECTIVE  
RHMFISS/HQ USAFRICOM STUTTGART GE  
RHMFISS/CDR USAFRICOM STUTTGART GE  
RHMFISS/CDR USEUCOM VAIHINGEN GE  
RUZEHAA/CDR USEUCOM INTEL VAIHINGEN GE  
RUEKJCS/OSD WASHINGTON DC  
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC  
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHDC

UNCLAS NIAMEY 001084

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PLS PASS TO USAID FOR AFR/W

SIPDIS  
SENSITIVE BUT UNCLASSIFIED

E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: NIGER: MNSD LEADERS SELECT PM OUMAROU AS INTERIM PARTY  
PRESIDENT; POLICE USE TEAR GAS TO QUELL SCUFFLES

REF: a) Niamey 1039, b) Niamey 1028, c) Niamey 0638

¶1. (U) On November 9, the ruling party Mouvement National de la Societe de Developpement (MNSD) convened a leadership meeting at its headquarters to select an interim party president. After a lengthy day of consultations, party leadership selected current Prime Minister Seini Oumarou. Party leadership decided to retain the current party Secretary General, Habi Mahamadou Salissou, and formed an ad hoc steering committee of six members, three each from the pro-Hama Amadou camp and three from the pro-Tandja bloc, to guide party matters. Participants made no effort to dismiss party leaders, contrary to various rumors.

¶2. (U) Outside the MNSD headquarters, however, partisans engaged in heated verbal exchanges, with some minor scuffling. One report states that some present threw rocks at the Minister of Interior's car on his arrival, causing police to use tear gas to disperse the crowd.

¶3. (U) This event follows the October 19 rally by pro-Hama Amadou supporters (Ref A) and several attempts by party leadership to organize a party caucus to choose an interim president, as the former prime minister remains in prison following his June 26 detention on charges of corruption (Ref B).

¶4. (SBU) Comment: This event, long anticipated, may serve to buy a period of relative peace with a divided MNSD roughly one year ahead of anticipated late 2009 legislative and presidential elections. Raising the stature of PM Oumarou raises the question of whether doing so elevates his standing, suggesting a potential presidential candidacy (Ref C), or diminishes his stature, by placing him in a position guaranteed to keep him fully occupied for the months ahead.

PM Oumarou is regarded as wise and personable, but decidedly low-key in nature; perhaps his selection as MNSD interim president represents widely held interest in settling party matters quickly and quietly. The prospect of an effort by President Tandja to extend his time in office, however, remains to be clarified. End comment.

ALLEN